

Christmas in France



Christmas Holiday

- The 25th December is a public holiday in France, as it is in Britain. However, Boxing Day on the 26th is not a holiday, because it's an English, not French, tradition. So everyone goes to work!



Saint Nicolas

- It was Saint Nicolas who was the original Father Christmas, or 'Père Noël' as he is known in France. Traditionally, it was St Nicholas who brought the presents to children.



Le Père Noël

- If you look carefully at the pictures of Santa and Saint Nicholas, you will find the
- the long white beard
- the Bishop's mitre, which is Santa's hat
- the red coat



Père Fouettard

- Père Noël travels with Père Fouettard who tells him how each child has behaved during the year. Good children receive presents. Naughty children get no gifts.
- In some parts of France Père Noël brings small gifts on St. Nicholas Eve (December 6) and visits again on Christmas Eve.



Decorations

- In France, one of the most important decorations at Christmas time is the Sapin de Noël (Christmas tree). It is used in homes, streets, shops, offices, and factories. The trees in the streets are real, not plastic.
- The idea of the Christmas tree came from Alsace in the 14th century.

Strasbourg, Alsace



Welcome at Christmas

- The Christmas wreath is hung on the door to say "soyez la bienvenue chez nous" (Welcome to our house). Originally, this was an Anglo-Saxon tradition which was later adopted by the French.
- The wreath is round shaped, to represent the sun hanging at the door.

The Christmas Wreath

- This is called: 'La couronne de bienvenue' in French.



History of the Christmas Wreath

- In the past, the Christmas wreath had four candles which represented the four weeks before Christmas, called Advent. Each Sunday, one of the candles was lit as a count down to the special day.
- The crown is often decorated with holly (le houx), the spiky leaves representing the Passion of Christ, and the red berries the blood of Christ.

Le houx

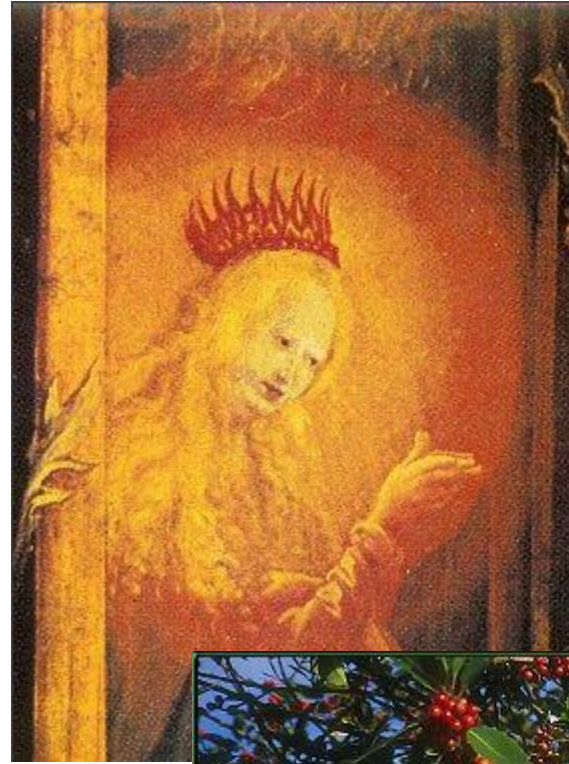


The Holly Legend

- Tradition says that holly is important because of the way it helped the Holy Family. In order to escape from King Herod's massacre of the Infants, Mary and Joseph left for Egypt with the baby Jesus. On the way the holly trees spread out their spiky branches to protect and hide them.

The Holly Legend (2)

- As a reward, Mary declared that it would remain evergreen, as a symbol of immortality.
- Tradition also says that in order to have a prosperous year, you have to have holly in the the house at Christmas!

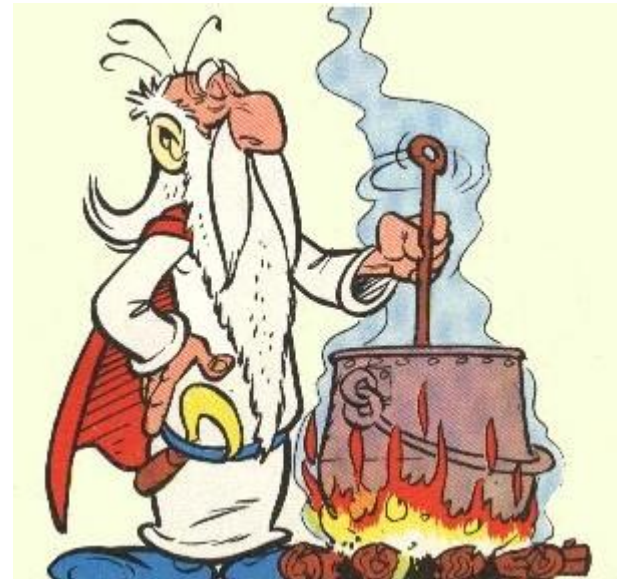


Le gui : Mistletoe



History of the Mistletoe

- This plant has a long history. For the ancient Celtic Druids, it was considered sacred because of its miraculous properties - in healing, protection against all sorts of evils, and witchcraft.



Mistletoe



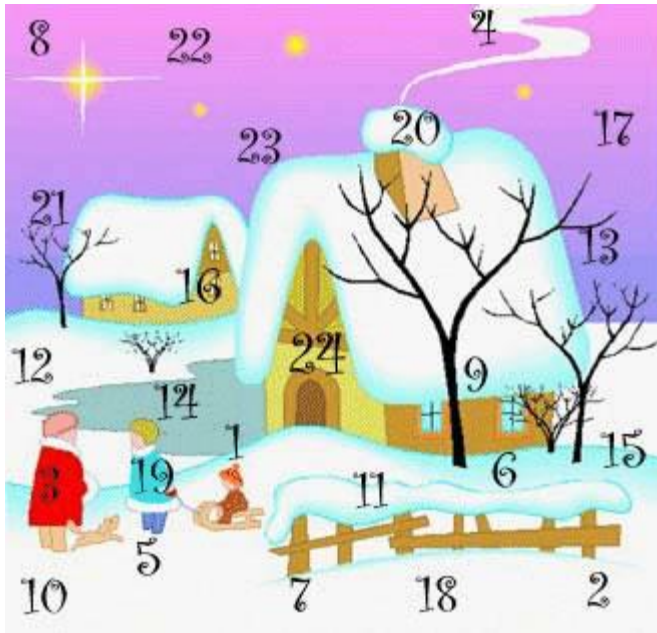
- At Christmas, and more especially on New Years Eve, mistletoe is suspended - either from the ceiling, a rafter or in a doorway. It's the tradition to kiss under the mistletoe, a symbol of prosperity and a long life.

La veille de Noël

- On Christmas Eve the bells of the churches and cathedrals ring to call people to the Mass at midnight. Midnight Mass is a tradition in Europe.



Le Calendrier de l'Avent



- Advent is the period of four weeks before the birth of Christ. With the Advent Calendar you can count down the days before Christmas. Behind each window or door, there are pictures or little chocolates or lollies.

Christmas Eve

- French children don't just leave out socks, they may also leave their shoes by the fireplace to be filled with gifts from Père Noël.



Jour de Noël

- In the morning they also find that sweets, fruit, nuts and small toys have been left by Santa. In other places it is 'Le Petit Jésus' who brings the gifts. Adults have no gifts at Christmas but wait until New Year's Day to exchange presents.



Santa's reindeer

The reindeer are called:

Fougueux, (Dasher)

Danseur, (Dancer)

Fringant, (Prancer)

Mégère, (Vixen)

Comète, (Comet)

Cupidon, (Cupid)

Tonnerre (Donner or
Thunder)

Eclair (Blixen or
Lightning).



Le traîneau = the
sledge

Un renne = a reindeer

La creche

- St Francis of Assisi is said to have been the first to make a Crib. This was in a cave in Greccio, Italy, during Christmas 1223. The tradition of having a crib at Christmas became very common in Italy and France.



La crèche

- Many French homes have a crib or *crèche* at Christmas time. They may also be seen in shops, town centres and churches.



Santons



Santons' are little figures that make the crib more like real life in a village. The characters are traditional and you can see them mostly in the South of France.

Le réveillon

- On Christmas Eve, when people have finished buying their last minute purchases, the streets become deserted. It's time for "*le réveillon*" or the special Christmas meal. All the family eat together at this time. People traditionally have seafood, such as oysters, roast turkey and 'une bûche de Noël.

Ready for the 'réveillon'



Le repas

- The meal has quite a few different courses and each course often has its own wine to accompany it.



Attention!

- If you are invited to a meal like this, be careful to remember not to eat too much to start with or you may not be able to finish the meal! Especially if you are in the South of France in Provence, where there are thirteen different desserts on the table!

Un menu de Noël en France?

- The following could be a typical Christmas or New Year meal for people in France
- You would have 'nibbles' to start the meal, for example:
- 'Canapés': little pieces of toasted bread which have delicacies on them
- 'Vol au vents': little pastry shells that contain a variety of tasty fillings
- 'Crudités': little pieces of raw vegetables such as carrot, celery or green peppers.

Les canapés



Les vol au vents



Les crudités



Les Apéritifs

- Often, Champagne is served as an apéritif (a before dinner drink).



Les apéritifs

- Other apéritifs are Kir (Champagne with blackcurrant liqueur called "cassis"), Whisky or Pernod. You add water to Pernod to make it a long drink. When you do this, the drink becomes cloudy.



MJP-Photographs



MJP-Photographs



www.AbsintheBuyersGuide.com © 2007

Entrée: Pâté de foie gras

- This is goose liver pâté. It is very expensive. You can only eat a little at a time. Sometimes it has a truffle for decoration.



Les Fruits de mer

- This is seafood, for example, prawns, (les crevettes) crabs, (les crabes), crayfish (les langoustines) or trout (les truites).



Le plat principal

- la dinde (turkey)
- This comes with some vegetables and is served with a nice sauce
- La salade (green salad)
- After this is la salade. This is to clean the taste of the other food from your mouth. It is also a rest between courses.

La dinde et la salade



Le fromage: Cheese

- Now it is the 'le fromage' or the cheese course. Some famous cheeses are: Camembert, Brie and Gruyère. You would eat the cheese with bread and drink red wine.



Dessert

- Still got some room? Time for 'les fruits'! During winter most fruit is imported from warmer climates. As it's Christmas, people try to find something really special.



More desserts

- And there's more! Now it's everyone's favourite - la bûche de Noël.



La Bûche de Noël

- The Bûche de Noël (or Christmas log) is a special cake for Christmas. It's a sponge cake which is rolled and shaped like a log. Inside there is often a creamy filling and then it is covered in chocolate.



Le café - Coffee

- To finish, everyone would have a cup of coffee.(une tasse de café) and a very special Champagne. There might be some "petits fours" to eat as well - these are little biscuits.



Les petits fours



Les digestifs

- Sometimes people like to drink a "digestif" after their meal. This is a strong alcoholic drink served in tiny glasses. Digestifs are made from grapes or any fruit and are often called "eaux de vie". There is even an eau de vie de sapin! (pine digestif!)

Les digestifs



13 desserts in Provence!

- In Provence, at Christmas, there is the tradition of serving thirteen different desserts at the end of the traditional Christmas Dinner.

13 desserts

- The desserts have a religious meaning. The number thirteen represents the twelve Apostles plus Jesus.
- The first four desserts were traditionally for the religious orders (monks and nuns) who begged for their food:
 - almonds for the Carmelites
 - figs for the Franciscans
 - raisins for the Dominicans
 - walnuts for the Augustines

- Then four dishes of fresh fruit:

- Apples
- Pears
- Oranges
- melons



Nearly finished!

- Last, but not least
- black nougat and white nougat
- quince jam candies
- A savoury bread (fougasse) filled with sun dried tomatoes, or anchovy paste, olive oil and garlic
- dates

Les trieze desserts de Noel



Joyeux Noel!

- Et Bonne Année!